

THIS PAMPHLET WAS PUT TOGETHER IN  
FEBRUARY 2010 IN KINGSTON, ONTARIO BY  
END THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

*Epíic*

GET IN TOUCH WITH US AT [EPIC@RISEUP.NET](mailto:EPIC@RISEUP.NET)  
FEEL FREE TO REPRINT, STEAL, COPY AND SHARE  
ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS PIECE.

Correctional Service  
Canada

Collins Bay  
Institution



**SUPERPRISONS IN CANADA  
WHAT THEY ARE  
HOW TO STOP THEM**

# INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet was written in Kingston Ontario, the city with the largest concentration of prisons in Canada, and our hometown. We wrote it to bring people up to speed with what we see as a dangerous agenda at work within the federal government with respect to the Canadian prison system. At this very moment, the federal Conservative Party, their various corporate partners, and their provincial proxy-parties are pushing hard for a major expansion of the **Prison Industrial Complex (PIC)**. This is the term we use to refer to the interest groups, businesses, and government institutions that rely on locking people up to increase their bottom line. While private contractors are a major aspect of the PIC – one we'll delve into later in this pamphlet – this issue is about more than privatization. It's about an ideology of "Law and Order" driven by fear, racism, and moral panic. It's about the extent to which the logic of prison is being extended into society generally, through increased surveillance and heavier-handed policing in the name of "public safety." And it's about our town, Kingston, Ontario, where the first Canadian prison was ever built, and what it means to be a city that experiences economic booms when more people are being put in prison.

This pamphlet touches on a few specific issues relating to the ongoing Conservative revolution in prisons and policing, and tries to strategically show a few points of intervention for people who want to resist this expansion. Most of our research has focused on the internal plan to construct new super-prisons, but related issues such as the closing of the prison farms, the backdoor privatization of the prison system, and the introduction of draconian amendments to the Criminal Code are all elements of the Conservative transformation in its vulnerable and weak introductory phase, which could be resisted simultaneously in order to disrupt this current process. The strong link between the ousted Mike Harris regime in Ontario, and the key players in the Corrections transformation sheds light on what we might expect in the next year. Drawing on the experiences of the anti-Harris movement could provide insight into effective tactics and strategies with which to resist and ultimately defeat the current government and any future governments determined to implement such policies.

There is no single strategy that will, on its own, reverse the regressive policies being pushed by the current Conservative government. The one thing we are unwaveringly convinced of is that the current government will not change direction based on moral persuasion or sound logic. Mobilizing public opinion through traditional activism could be one effective interim measure to slow down the current process. Political and economic disruption of the Conservatives' ability to govern is another important set of tactics that should be seriously considered as a part of a strategy to defeat the current government.

Each group involved in a movement built to oppose the current transformation will bring their own interests and expertise to the table, and will probably not have a shared long-term vision beyond resisting the current change. From our perspective as an anti-PIC organization, coalitions can facilitate cross-germination of ideas, and this issue could build momentum to energize a new movement in Canada that could go on the offensive and directly challenge the Prison-Industrial Complex and simultaneously support the development of community-based restorative justice alternatives to the PIC. This is why the current transformation, which seeks to redefine 'Canadian' culture itself, must be reversed while it is still weak, before it becomes entrenched and much more difficult to break.

## FURTHER READING

### Regional Campaigns

Save Our Prison Farm Campaign: [www.saveourfarms.ca](http://www.saveourfarms.ca)

Harper Index: [www.harperindex.ca](http://www.harperindex.ca)

John Howard Society: [www.johnhoward.ca](http://www.johnhoward.ca)

Citizens Against Private Prisons: [www.capp.50megs.com](http://www.capp.50megs.com)

Against Prison: [www.againstprison.wordpress.com](http://www.againstprison.wordpress.com)

4struggle Magazine: [www.4strugglemag.org](http://www.4strugglemag.org)

### United States

Critical Resistance: [www.criticalresistance.org](http://www.criticalresistance.org)

Prison Activist Resource Centre: [www.prisonactivist.org](http://www.prisonactivist.org)

California Prison Moratorium Project: [www.calipmp.org](http://www.calipmp.org)



In the Kingston area there is a coalition to ‘**Save the Prison Farms.**’ In 2009, the federal government announced it would be closing farms owned by CSC, which until now have formed a part of the rehabilitation strategy for eligible prisoners. This sparked a coalition composed of pro-rehabilitation progressive religious groups, the **National Farmers Union**, and the **Union of Solicitor General Employees**, and social democrats in general. This campaign has received critical support from advocacy organizations such as the **John Howard Society**, MPs from all political parties, and dissenting factions within Corrections Canada. Even the local Conservative candidate, Brian Abrams, has gone on record with lip service to the effect that he doesn’t support his own party’s plans to close the prison farms.

The Roadmap’s feasibility study makes it abundantly clear that land from the closed farms will be used to construct superprisons and/or sold-off to raise funds for the expansion of the prison system. A likely candidate site for a superprison in Kingston is the **Frontenac Farm at Collins Bay**, and federal officials have hinted that this might be the case. The SOPF coalition has recognized this connection, and could be an important ally in this movement. As the dairy cows from the farms are scheduled to be auctioned off in June (most likely to American farmers because of dairy-board-controlled milk quotas in Ontario), the next few months provide an important window for the convergence of related struggles.



*Old sign for the Collins Bay Penitentiary Farm, where prisoners milked cows and grew crops for the prison and the food bank.*

## 1ST MOVE: THE REVIEW PANEL

In April 2007, then-Minister of Public Safety Stockwell Day created a panel to conduct a sweeping review of the federal prison system. **Rob Sampson’s** appointment as chair of this panel is of particular significance considering he was Ontario premier Mike Harris’ go-to man for privatization of public services, and the chief political architect of Canada’s first private prison: the Central North Correctional Centre.

The Central North Correctional Centre was constructed in 2001 at Penetanguishene, Ontario to replace three provincial prisons, earning it the nickname of “superjail.” Rob Sampson contracted out the management of the prison to a private American corporation, **Management and Training Corporation**, on a five-year lease. This first step towards privatizing Canadian prisons was met with considerable grassroots opposition, notably from the public service unions and a group calling itself Citizens Against Private Prisons led by Sharon Dion. In 2006, Dalton McGuinty’s Liberal government decided not to renew the contract, citing the “human costs” of the private prison including: reduced healthcare, high re-offender rates, and increased violence leading to frequent lockdowns.



**Photo-op for the CSC Review Panel**  
*(From Left to Right): Serge Gascon, Sharon Rosenfeldt, Stockwell Day, Ian Glen, and Rob Sampson*

## 2ND MOVE: THE ROADMAP

A mere six months after coming together, the CSC review panel released a 255-page report entitled, “**A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety.**” Bureaucratically speaking, six months is an impossibly short timeframe for a sweeping review of the federal prison system and the compilation of a comprehensive report. It is hard to believe this blueprint wasn’t already largely pre-written by Conservative ideologues, especially given its conclusions. Some key points are discussed below, but for a more comprehensive response, see **A Flawed Compass: A Human Rights Analysis of the Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety** by Michael Jackson and Graham Stewart (September 2009).

One recommendation of the Roadmap was to ‘modernize’ Corrections’ physical infrastructure by building ‘**regional complexes**’ (superprisons) containing up to 2200 cells, combining minimum, medium, and maximum security, as well as a ‘special handling unit’ aimed at long-term incarceration in complete isolation and under heavy surveillance.

The Roadmap also called for a strengthening of so-called **Public-Private Partnerships (P3s)** in superprison construction. While it falls short of advocating for full private management, which was the case in Penetanguishene, it advocates for the privatization of every other part of the process: financing, construction, maintenance, and service delivery (e.g. food providers). This process is called backdoor privatization; when carried out to its logical endpoint, it results in a weak, token public agency charged with overseeing an operation entirely carried out by a far more robust profit-driven private sector.



The broader network of organizations opposed to neoconservative criminal policies will play an important part in this debate. Anti-drug war, and especially **pro-decriminalization** of marijuana groups exist in every major city in the country, and include among their membership legal societies, public officials, harm reduction health advocates, educators, and even police associations.

A strong movement opposing the expansion of the PIC already exists in the United States, where the prison system has already undergone the transformations started under Reagan. In terms of the measures being proposed for Canada, we have a great deal to learn from prison abolitionist and anti-PIC organizations such as **Critical Resistance** and the **California Prison Moratorium Project**, who have considerable experience and would bring valuable expertise to the table, specifically for dealing with new prison construction. Canada’s growing **autonomist and anarchist** movement is likely to participate autonomously in this fight if it can be directly connected to a struggle against the Prison Industrial Complex in general. Prison expansion and construction might be the right crossroads issue to bring together a lot of people for a fierce resistance.

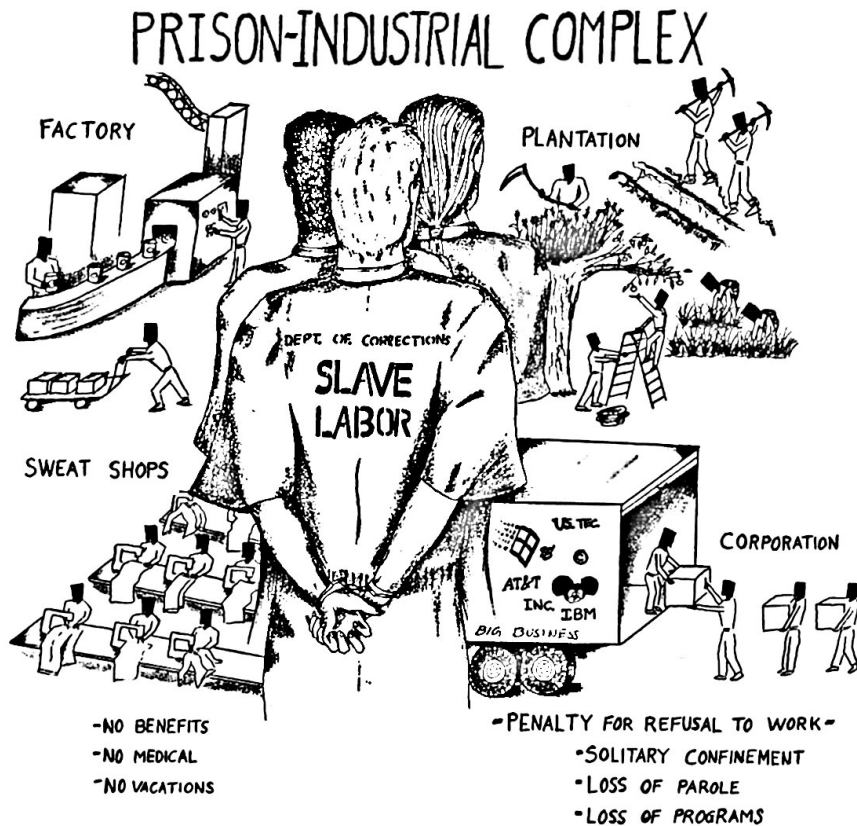


*Renowned scholar and political activist Angela Davis writes about and speaks out against the Prison-Industrial Complex through work with groups such as Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence..*



The **public service unions** have a particular interest in privatization, and should be (re)activated on this issue. The guards unions, a complicated character in this debate, obviously hold a vested interest in the Prison-Industrial Complex. Still, there are many guards who believe that the current transformation will not create a safer workplace, nor will it contribute to a better society.

Indigenous, immigrant, poor white, black, and other marginalized communities are always the hardest hit by the Prison Industrial Complex. We must work (not for, but side by side) with existing **community organizations and anti-poverty groups** in combating the looming changes to the prison system. This is a relevant issue to the day-to-day struggles of these communities, not an abstract cause.



The ‘Transformation Team’ charged with the Roadmap’s implementation has, according to its documents, already received a preliminary briefing from the **Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships (CCPPP)**. This is significant as the CCCPP is a major federal lobby group whose membership directory reads like a who’s who of Canadian corporations and development-oriented public institutions. The CCCPP touts the private prison experiment in Ontario as a total success, even awarding it a ‘Gold Award for Service Delivery’ in 2002. Not surprisingly, the global consulting firm **Deloitte and Touche LLP** is listed as a sponsor member on the CCCPP website; this is the same firm contracted by the Review Panel to conduct a ‘feasibility study’ to support the case for future superprisons to be built on the P3 model.



*Panel discussion during CCCPP's annual conference*

Another major recommendation of the Roadmap was the elimination of statutory release. In Canada, after 2/3rds of a sentence has been served, and barring ‘bad behavior,’ a prisoner is automatically released under supervision into the community for the remainder of the sentence; this is called statutory release. The Review Panel argues for the abolition of this practice, so that early release must be ‘earned’ by demonstrating one’s successful rehabilitation to a Parole Board. This fundamental shift will ensure that many prisoners will spend much longer behind bars. In fact, extended incarceration constitutes an important part of the Conservative correctional ideology, discussed below.

## 3RD MOVE: TRANSFORMATION TEAM

Not surprisingly, the Conservative government unconditionally endorsed every single recommendation in the Roadmap, and moved in its 2008 Budget to lay the groundwork for its implementation. One major shift was to scale-back maintenance investment in the existing prison infrastructure, basically applying the Ronald Reagan method of ‘starving the beast’. Reganite methods saw governments scaling back physical maintenance of existing infrastructure purposefully, in order to create the need for constructing new infrastructure they had already committed to helping their corporate partners build. A taskforce was created to strategically implement the Roadmap, ominously titled ‘**The Transformation Team.**’



**Correctional Service of Canada Transformation Team (left to right):** *Suzanne Laplante, Mary Beth Wolicky, Julie Blasko, Chris Price, Morris Zbar, Brenda LePage, Jim LaPlante, Denise Mainville-Vantour, Don Head, Richard Harvey, France Poisson, Phil Higo (missing from the photo).*

**Morris Zbar** was made leader of the transformation team. Zbar happened to be Rob Sampson’s right-hand man as Deputy Minister of Corrections under the Mike Harris government. This appointment is key to ensuring continuity of the neoconservative ideological vision. In its November 2009 report-back to the federal Corrections community, the CSC Transformation Agenda document acknowledges its own relationship to the punishment agenda of the federal government. This is evidence that contrary to prior posturing, the prison construction plan is not about transferring the existing prisoner population to new, more ‘appropriate’ institutions so much as expanding the Prison Industrial Complex:

## WHAT’S THE NEXT MOVE?

The Transformation Team’s funding ends in March 2010. We are living at a crucial juncture in time, a moment where it is imperative for us to get organized. This is the first shot across the bow, an ideological flexing of muscles from the far-right wing of the Conservative party. They are testing the waters to see how much we’ll let them get away with, and now is the time to make sure this plan dies on the vine. Below are a few thoughts of different ways we may learn from the past, build on existing momentum, and make a well-planned movement strategy for the future.

Many of the key players in the transformation are ex-members of the **Mike Harris** government. The Penetanguishene experiment with private prisons, funded by ‘Superbuild’ and called the Infrastructure Renewal Program, used identical language to that appearing in reports today. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel. There was a united movement against Mike Harris, and that movement should be resurrected to jumpstart a Canada-wide movement against **Stephen Harper**.

We should realize that this government is driven by a merger of hardened ideologues and religious fundamentalists. Any strategy based on persuading the Conservatives to ‘do the right thing’ is doomed to fail. When tens of thousands of people took to the streets to put demands on Mike Harris, he wrote them off as “special interest groups.” We should expect the same lack of respect from the Harper regime.

**We must brace for a fight,  
not a civil debate.**





Neoconservatives deny any of the root causes of crime in society such as poverty, racism, or any other social marginalization or neglect. **Neoconservative criminology** is the result of the pairing of this underlying denial with right-wing social policies expanding the definition of crime, such as the war on drugs and the repression of political dissent. This approach frees the government from any responsibility to investigate or interact with social inequalities as a realistic strategy to reducing crime, allowing them to instead turn to incarceration as the solution to broadly-defined ‘crime.’

With all underlying causes for criminality removed from the picture, conservative-minded politicians freely attribute the cause of crime to personal choice: bad people choose to be bad due to their bad nature, or historically speaking, ‘wicked souls.’ This evil may be a result of mental depravity, moral deviance, or other corruptions of the soul as represented by certain fundamentalist variants of Christianity, which hold great sway within the current

Conservative party. These ‘bad’ people are supernaturally corrupt; they cannot be rehabilitated, and therefore should be punished unmercifully. They should suffer and take that suffering as their salvation, just as historically Christian fundamentalists and inquisitors did to Europeans who wouldn’t convert to Christianity – Jews and others deemed to be agents of Satan. This set of attitudes and beliefs is the historical foundation for the current ideology at work within the federal government.



*Torture as punishment was seen as a gift to the offender, a chance for redemption before death.*

*“Adjust interim capital plans to respond to potential population increases associated with pending legislation”*

Public servants are required to publish their travel and hospitality expenses online in proactive disclosure. We were able to find out about the Transformation Team’s field trip to Florence, Colorado. This trip is extremely interesting as prior disclosures from the Transformation Team are specific about who attends their various meetings, while the description of the Colorado trip is notably bare: “*Transformation Team visits an institution in Colorado.*” With requests for information pending, we can only speculate at this point, but we would bet that trip was to go visit the infamous **Florence Federal Correctional Complex (FFCC)**.

The FFCC model is similar to the proposed Canadian superprisons: Florence houses multiple facilities, is publicly owned, but has heavy private-sector involvement. It is the site of ADX Florence, the only Federal Supermax in the United States, nicknamed the ‘Alcatraz of the Rockies.’ Prisoners there are kept in isolated lockdown for 23 hours a day, and every comfort is considered a privilege to be taken away for the slightest display of disobedience. We are convinced from our

research that if the current trajectory stands, Florence represents the future of the federal prison system in Canada. One prisoner of ADX Florence noted that the facilities were specifically designed to “inflict pain and misery,”

and a former warden referred to the facility as “a cleaner version of Hell.” As we uncover below, the Neoconservative **Criminological paradigm** reflects just this historical idea of punishment.



*ADX Supermax in Florence, Colorado*



**Bird's-eye view of the Collins Bay Penitentiary and the adjacent Frontenac Institution.**

**The Save Our Farms coalition and their allies in government have called attention  
to this land as a potential site for the a proposed superprison.**